

Manufacturing Development Commission:

Career & Technical Education (CTE) and Standards of Learning (SOL) testing – VA Education Requirements

Del. Mike Watson



Background:

During the April 2, 2013 meeting of the Manufacturing Development Commission in Richmond, Sen. Frank Wagner raised the issue of SOLs and CTEs and expressed concern that all students, whether College or Career Bound, must currently take the same Standards of Learning tests (“SOLs”). Whereas this may be practical for College Bound students, he believes that Career Bound students would benefit through a strategy where they could replace certain SOL requirements with CTE or Industry Certifications consistent with their career path. To further this discussion, Sen. Wagner designated MDC member, Del. Mike Watson to research the potential for successful implementation of such a strategy and to offer a preliminary assessment to the commission at the next meeting.

The Virginia State Board of Education has approved for the student-selected verified credit option 150 credentials for career and technical education (CTE) courses and/or course sequences. Approved credentials are being used for awarding student-selected verified credit—required for graduation (standard or advanced studies diploma). Students in Virginia earn two types of credit during high school. Standard credit is based on hours of instruction and successful completion of the course. Verified credit is based on standard credit plus a passing score on an end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) test, or other Board of Education approved substitute test. *Taken from information at the following link:*

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career technical/path industry certification/cte credentials/why credential.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/career%20technical/path%20industry%20certification/cte%20credentials/why%20credential.pdf)

Preliminary Meeting:

On April 30, 2013 a preliminary discussion on the subject was held at the GAB.

Attendees were:

Mark Vucci, Division of Legislative Services;

Anne Wescot, DOE - Policy & Communications;

Lan Neugent, DOE – Technology, Career & Adult Education

Lolita Hall, DOE – Career & Technical Education Services

Del. Mike Watson, Member – Manufacturing Development Commission

Meeting Notes:

- Current SOLs – Science, Math, English, History/Social Studies.
- English & Math SOLs given in grades 3 - 8, then after certain courses.
- Science & History SOLs given in grades 3, 5, and 8, then at end of High School courses.
- These can be taken in other years if so determined by individual school system.
- Statewide over 50,000 students are coming out of high school with some type of Industrial Certification.
- VA has 10 Regional Education Centers (i.e. New Horizons) that teach CTE.

- Many high schools still provide Career & Technical curriculums in-house.
- CTE's are based on competency certifications, not SOLs.
- SOL tests are revised on a 7-year cycle.
- CTE criteria is driven by industry needs, generally updated on 3-5 year cycles. Annually, 50 to 70 CTE courses are updated.
- Today, after setting up the CTE Programs, they are brought to the school system to confirm they are integrated with existing SOLs.
- New 2013/14 – Starting with 9th grade classes, if student pursues a 'Standard Diploma', he/she must have some kind of career credential in order to graduate.
- Acceptable Industry Certifications can be developed through:
 - National Occupational Testing Institute
 - VA Workplace Skills Assessment
 - industry certification/licensure examinations
- Today – beginning with 8th grade and at the end of the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades, students must go through an exercise to identify a prospective academic or career path plan.
- Regulations require that students are exposed to CTE.
- The DOE has developed the Virginia Education Wizard <https://www.vawizard.org/vccs/Main.action> to introduce parents and students to career and education opportunities.
- With the new Academic & Career Plan requirement, more students and parents will become aware of the Virginia Education Wizard.
- Under current regulations <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+reg+8VAC20-131-50>, first-time ninth graders pursuing a Standard Diploma must earn the following number of verified credits (by passing an SOL test or other assessment approved by the Board of Education) in: English (2), Mathematics (1), Laboratory Science (1), History and Social Sciences (1), and Student Selected Test (1). For the Student Selected Test verified credit, students may utilize additional tests for earning verified credit (SOL alternative) in computer science, technology, career and technical education, economics or other areas as prescribed by the board in [8VAC20-131-110](http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?000+reg+8VAC20-131-110). In addition, students who complete a career and technical education program sequence and are conferred with a certification or an occupational competency credential from a recognized industry, or trade or professional association, or who acquire a professional license in a career and technical education field from the Commonwealth may substitute the certification, competency credential or license for (a) the Student Selected verified credit and (b) either a Science or History and Social Sciences verified credit when the certification, license or credential confers more than one verified credit.
- There was a general consensus that steps must be taken to resolve the 'stigma' issue with pursuing a CTE in high school and in Community Colleges.
 - We are missing the opportunity to provide valuable skills training to a large segment of students including those that would prove successful in a 4-year university environment.
 - We are missing the opportunity to build a highly-skilled workforce which is a deterrent to drawing businesses, especially manufacturing, to the Commonwealth.
- Some suggestions were made to change certain nomenclature, including in the Code of Virginia, associated with CTE such as offering both SOL and SOC testing (Standards of Career

& Technical) among others. The concept is to put SOLs and competency assessments for CTE classes on the same playing field. DOE was asked to follow-up to see if such changes to the Code of Virginia and education-related documents can be implemented in a manner that is not cost prohibitive.

- It was agreed that further steps should be evaluated to both alter this 'stigma' and to introduce parents and students to the CTE related career opportunities.

Summary:

Everyone in attendance recognized the need to promote Career and Technical Education opportunities to all students. There was also a general consensus that milestones such as Industry Certification or other approved competency test would prove as useful or more useful for many career bound students. As an example, a student that earns an Industrial Welding Certification or an Electrical License and is pursuing a career in the respective field will be better served by using this as competency verification as opposed to taking a Social Studies SOL.

Under the aforementioned VA law, the Board of Education currently has the flexibility to offer alternatives to certain SOLs. I believe that we (or individual school systems) should evaluate these options further to identify, and make widely known, what alternatives are practicable and available and are consistent with the current and future job market. Furthermore, these alternatives should be reviewed by each system in coordination with area employers or prospective employers so that our schools are producing the skilled workforce that is necessary to keep and grow VA businesses.